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ABSTRACT

Communal life in Malaysia is characterized by discords, tensions, and strife, especially between the Malays and Chinese. By and large, Malays are educationally and economically backward in comparison to non-Malays. Malays seek to redress what they consider racial imbalances through use of their political power. Constitutionally, certain privileges are reserved for Malays; this is resented bitterly by non-Malays. During the British rule, four types of schools emerged--Malay, Chinese, Indian, and English. Under the colonial government, these schools continued their independent, segregated development. The national government of Malaysia, which is controlled by Malays, has launched a massive Malaynization program. Non-Malays fear extinction of their culture, identity, and language. Malays are now the sole recipients of all educational advantages, including free primary and secondary education and a monopoly of grants for higher education. The present educational policy restricts the preservation and advancement of the non-Malay cultures. From the standpoint of national interest, the only rational policy is that of accommodation and compromise, in which all constituent elements have a sense of satisfaction and none feels oppressed. (Author/JG)

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ETHNICITY, COMMUNAL RELATIONS, AND EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

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ETHNICITY, COMMUNAL RELATIONS, AND EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia was formed in 1963 through a federation of the Federation of Malaya, Sarawak, Sabah, and Singapore. Singapore withdrew from the federation in 1965. Malaysia lies in south-eastern Asia. It occupies the southern three-fourths of the Malay Peninsula and most of the northern part of the island of Borneo. The part of the country on the Malay Peninsula is West Malaysia. The part on Borneo is East Malaysia. Both are separated from each other by 400 miles of the South China Sea.

Malaysia is a tropical country. Densely forested mountains run north-south in the center of the Malay Peninsula. To the west of the mountains are the plains and the main cities of Malaysia. Much of Sarawak and Sabah are covered with dense forests and are uninhabitable.

The population of Malaysia is about twelve million. Slightly over a million people live in Sarawak, about three-fourths of a million in Sabah, and the remainder in Malaya. Malays (44 per cent), Chinese (36 per cent), and Indians (10 per cent) form the largest ethnic groups. The remainder are tribesmen who mostly live in Sarawak and Sabah. Main languages of Malaysia are Malay, Chinese, Tamil, English, and tribal dialects. Islam is the state religion. Other religions practiced in the country include Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Hinduism, and certain tribal rituals.[1]

Historical Background

Evidence of human existence in Malaysia goes back to 35,000 years ago. Mesolithic culture existed about 10,000 years ago. About 2500 to 1500 B. C., a Neolithic people came down the Malay Peninsula from the north. These were followed by a people who introduced Bronze-Iron Age to south-east Asia.[2]

History of Malaysia prior to the beginning of the fifteenth century can be inferred mainly from the scant archaeological artifacts and the sketchy accounts of foreign travelers, mostly Chinese. With the start of the fifteenth century, the Sejarah Melayu (Malay Annals) and the accounts written by the Portuguese offer a fairly accurate information about Malaysia.

About the beginning of the first century A.D., Indian traders established contacts with Malaysia and brought their cultural influence including Hinduism and Buddhism in successive waves for centuries. By the third century Chinese became trading partners of Malaysia. In the nineth century the empire of Sri Vijaya, a Buddhist Kingdom, occupied the Malay Peninsula. By the end of the fourteenth century the empire of Sri Vijaya came under heavy attack of the Thais from the north and of the Javanese Hindu empire of Majapahit from the south. Ultimately most of the peninsula came under the domination of the Thais.[3]

About the eleventh century the Arabs had established trade contacts between Malaysia and Western Europe. In the fourteenth century Malacca emerged as an important trade and cultural center from where Islam spread throughout the Malay Peninsula replacing Hinduism and later to the island of Borneo.

In 1511 the Portuguese captured Malacca, destroyed Muslim monopoly of the trade route, and brought European influence to Malaysia. In 1641 the Dutch defeated the Portuguese and became the dominating power of the region. About the middle of the eighteenth century the British came to the region and gradually consolidated their control of the Malaysian territories by 1909. From 1942 to 1945 Malaysia was under Japanese occupation. On the surrender of Japan in 1945 the British rule returned to Malaysia again. In 1957 the Federation of Malaya attained independence within the British Commonwealth of Nations. In 1963 the Federation of Malaya, the crown colonies of Sarawak and Sabah on the island of Borneo, and the crown colony of Singapore were combined to form Malaysia. Singapore seceded from Malaysia in 1965 to become an independent nation.4

The Ethnic Groups

The great ethnic diversity of Malaysian society is the result of successive waves of migrations of many varied groups to the area. The process began in prehistoric times with the southward movement of tribes from mainland southeast Asia into the Malay Peninsula. They mostly occupied coastal areas, sometimes penetrating inland a few miles along river banks. These people were the original inhabitants of the area and the ancestors of the non-Muslim non-Malay tribal groups of West Malaysia. The tribal groups of East Malaysia were generally of non-mainland origin and non-Muslim non-Malay in nature.5

About 2500 B.C., Malay speaking people from Sumatra and Java moved into both the Malay Peninsula and the island of Borneo. They pushed the original inhabitants into the interior and settled in coastal areas. The tribes that adopted their culture came to be known as proto-Malays. Sporadic migrations from Indonesian islands continued for several centuries. Some of them spoke Malayo-Polynesian tongue and added variety to the Malaysian society. This ethnic composition continued substantially unchanged until the sixteenth century when the Europeans came to the region in the quest of trade and colonization.

The Europeans by themselves being in small number did not significantly alter the basic ethnic composition of Malaysia. But their expanding economic activities attracted additional migrations from Indonesia as well as China and India. The Indonesians were readily assimilated in the Malay community, but the Chinese and Indians have continued to be the distinct ethnic elements of the Malaysian society. As a result of the increase in immigration during the latter half of the nineteenth century the Chinese and Indians are exceeded in number by the Malays only in West Malaysia. In East Malaysia the Chinese are second in size only to the combined total of the native non-Malay tribes, whereas the Indians are in insignificantly small number. A few other ethnic groups like Arabs, Burmese, Thais, and Filipinos arrived later and remain numerically inconsequential. Thus the main ethnic groups of the present-day Malaysia include the Malays, Chinese, Indians, and the native tribes.

The Malays

The Malay community by and large consists of two groups. One group migrated early from Indonesia and brought their Hindu culture and absorbed some of the native tribes. The second group consists of the later immigrants who brought their Islamic culture. Fusion between the two groups continued with Islam emerging as the dominant religion.

Thus Malays are primarily immigrants from the surrounding Indonesian islands, profess Islam, speak Malay language, and practice Malay culture. Culturally and politically they are the most dominant segment of the society. There is a Malay community in almost every town and settlement. They are mostly rural people and engage in agriculture and fishing. In their value system accumulation of wealth has low priority and cooperation is prized over competition.

The Chinese

The Chinese constitute the second largest ethnic group and inhabit all parts of the country in significant numbers. Their proportion in Malaysia is greater than in any other country outside China. They are primarily town-dwellers, dominate trade and commerce, and constitute a powerful group in the economic life of the nation. They retain their own language, preserve their own culture, and socially they remain a distinctly separate element of the Malaysian society. Politically they have been more or less inactive because the official policy has

traditionally excluded them from participation in the government and because they themselves have been intently preoccupied with the economic activities. They are hard-working, ambitious, and competitive, and they view accumulation of wealth as a mark of success and a source of prestige.

Although the Chinese had had trade and diplomatic contacts with the region for a long time and had formed a few permanent settlements after 1500, large scale immigration took place only after 1830 in response to the manpower needs of the British colonial enterprises in view of the inadequacy of the native labor force.[6] Also, the chaotic political and economic conditions caused by the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) in South China accelerated Chinese migration to other lands including Malaysia.[7]

Among the Malaysian Chinese there can be identified two broad groups. One group includes those who are educated in Chinese schools, whose social and business contacts are exclusively limited to the Chinese, and who generally do not mix with other ethnic groups of the society. The other group is more liberal in its attitudes. Its members are generally educated in English schools, and speak English, some Chinese dialects, and Malay. They are more progressive, are found in all occupations and professions, mix more readily with other ethnic groups, and consider themselves part of the Malaysian society.

The Indians

The Indians are almost exclusively found in West Malaysia. Beginning about the middle of the nineteenth century, they were imported to meet the manpower needs of the British colonial enterprises in the absence of Malay responsiveness to work.[8] The majority of them work on large rubber, coconut, and oil palm estates of the west coast, and live in rural communities. A small number reside in urban centers throughout West Malaysia and are engaged in all types of occupations and professions.

Most Indian plantation workers are from South India, with a few from the north. A majority of them are Hindus and speak Tamil. The Indian Muslims have been largely assimilated in the local Malay communities. But the rest continue to preserve their ethnic and cultural identity. Since Indians in Malaysia are in small number, they do not exert much influence at the national level.

The Tribal Groups

The tribal groups are the indigenous people of non-Malay origin. Semang, Senoi, and Jakun are the three distinct tribal groups of West Malaysia. They were well established in the area prior to the arrival of the first Malays from Indonesia. The main tribal groups in Sarawak are the Iban, Land Dayak, Melanau, Kayan, Kenyah, Kajang, Kelabit, Murut, Punan, and Penan. The main tribal groups in Sabah include Kadazan (Dusun), Murut,

and Bajau. The native tribal people constitute a significant number in East Malaysia, but their proportion in West Malaysia is very small. 9

The tribal people by and large continue their isolated life and perpetuate their primitive culture. They do not have a common language, and the differences of dialects divide even those communities that otherwise have a common culture. Some of them have been converted to Islam and some have adopted Christianity, but the majority are animistic in belief and practice. Diversity of their origin, language, and culture coupled with their small proportion of the total population and their backwardness render them politically ineffective as a group.

Communal Relations

Communal pluralism is the blatant fact of Malaysian society. It is composed of disparate people in terms of race, history, geography, religion, language, and culture. In the country as a whole Malays and Chinese constitute the numerically dominant ethnic groups whereas the Indians and the indigenous tribal people are small minorities. The ethnic groups are by no means monolithic and homogeneous. But the differences between the groups are more striking and form the basis of communalism. Malays speak Malay language, profess Islam, and practice Malay culture. Chinese speak a number of Chinese dialects, follow Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, or Christianity, and preserve their own customs and rituals. Indians mostly speak Tamil, profess Hinduism, and maintain their own cultural

identity. The tribal people are gradually being converted to Islam and Christianity but a large number of them still practice their own primitive religion and culture. Because of the segregated life style of these groups, the Malaysian society continues to be multiracial without much progress toward social integration. Only a few groups have integrated into the Malay community while the others jealously guard their cultural and ethnic identity.

Malaysia was created out of heterogenous groups lacking in common cultural heritage, purpose, and aspirations. To most of its citizens it is still an abstraction and fails to evoke emotional fervor. Some feel unjustly placed in it, find it irksome, and would welcome its disintegration. By and large communal interests take precedence over national interests and communal interactions are fraught with tensions and strifes.[10]

Malays constitute the largest community, consider themselves to be the original inhabitants (except the tribal people), and claim to be the rightful owners of the land. They view the Chinese and Indians as transients brought by the colonial entrepreneurs to work on their estates. They tolerate them by sufferance as second-class citizens and would prefer to see them go. They fear that the Chinese and Indian fertility rate is higher and they would eventually become a permanent minority. There is, however, no evidence to support their apprehension as the racial composition in Malaysia has remained relatively constant over the last fifty years.[11]

Racial segregation is reflected in residential and occupational patterns. Malays are predominant in the east coast of the Malay Peninsula whereas the west coast population is multi-racial. Malays are mostly rural people while the Chinese are concentrated in urban areas. Malays are by and large engaged in farming, fishing, and small rubber holdings. They also dominate the police, military, and civil service. Chinese on the other hand control the middle size businesses and industries and dominate the professions. Europeans own and manage most of the large industries and plantations. Indians are mostly rubber estate workers and live in plantation communities while those who live in cities engage in commerce and professions. Generally speaking, Malays compose the poorest segment of the society, Chinese the richest, and Indians the middle, although each group has its rich and poor.[12]

The communist insurgency in Malaysia from 1948 to 1960 was largely initiated and carried on by a minority of Chinese abetted by the communist government of mainland China. The Malays identify the communist threat as the Chinese threat and suspect the loyalty of the Chinese community. Antagonism to communism and the identification of communism with the Chinese have added to the dangerous division that exists between the two communities.[13]

The separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965 was politically motivated. It left the Malays in a substantial

majority in the country and the Chinese political power declined. The hostility between the two groups was the main cause of the sharp political schism that led to the severe racial violence in May, 1969. This aggravated the communal relations between the Malays and Chinese and heightened mutual suspicion of each other.[14]

Under the British rule the Malays enjoyed special position which gave them political supremacy vis-a-vis the other Asian communities because they were considered to be the legitimate owners of the land.[15] Chinese and Indians were looked upon as immigrants preoccupied with making money. All Malays automatically became citizens of Malaysia immediately after independence, but not the Chinese and Indians. Although the citizenship laws have been relaxed since 1957, early restrictions on citizenship for non-Malays served to ensure Malay electoral victory.[16]

Since 1967 Malay has been declared the sole official language of Malaysia. This policy is repugnant to the non-Malays. On several occasions the Chinese communal parties sought a reversal of this policy in favor of multi-lingualism. Such efforts are now constitutionally proscribed. Non-Malays see in it a grave danger to their education, language, and culture. Although the constitution guarantees the legitimate rights of

other communities, it has been periodically changed to protect and enhance Malay interests and to maintain Malay political supremacy.[17]

The constitution bestows special privileges on Malays. Article 153 provides: (1) the reservation for Malays of four-fifths of all appointments in the Malay Civil Service; (2) the reservation for Malays of three-fourths of all university scholarships; and (3) the prerogative of the king to issue business permits or licenses as required by federal law to Malays in whatever proportion he deems reasonable. Article 89 provides that land reserved for Malays both in rural and urban areas cannot be owned by non-Malays. The status of the Malay special privileges was to be reviewed in fifteen years. But after the communal riots of 1969 the Malays forced the government to make them permanent and irrevocable.[18]

From its independence Malaysia has had a turbulent history. Articles 149, 150, and 10 empower the government to suspend civil liberties, if necessary, to maintain law and order. The restriction of civil liberties under the state of emergency has caused more suffering to the Chinese than to the Malays.[19]

Electoral arrangements are designed to favor the predominantly rural Malays so that one rural Malay is equivalent to two urban Chinese at the ballot box. Thus political power rests with the Malays who always command a majority in the

parliament. Malays use the political power to further their own interests. Strong economic power of the Chinese provides the justification for these measures. Malaysian army and police which are almost exclusively manned by the Malays would insure the continuation of Malay political supremacy and special privileges.[20]

With the advent of independence the Malays concentrated their efforts on establishing the political supremacy of their own community. Today in Malaysia political power rests with the Malays and economic power with the Chinese, apart from the large business and industrial enterprises owned and managed by the Europeans.[21] With their political awakening the Malays became increasingly conscious of the adverse economic position of their community. They realized that theirs was essentially a subordinate role in their own country. Although they were protected by special political privileges, they were often employees of well-to-do non-Malays who were their money-lenders as well. The Malays seek to redress the economic imbalance between the races through the use of their political power.[22]

Malays and Chinese differ in their estimation of each other. Malays consider themselves as scrupulous in their interpersonal dealings, loyal to their families, friends, religion, and rulers, fond of simple, serene, decent life, and scornful of material acquisitions and competition. They view

Chinese as industrious, ambitious, acquisitive, clever, unscrupulous, insensitive, unclean, unreliable, and devoted to China and the Chinese culture.[23]

Chinese regard themselves as hard-working, progressive, competitive, and faithful to their families. To them Malays are lazy, superstitious, lacking motivation, incapable of hard work, contented with subsistence living, and solicitous of handouts and patronage. They contend that they built modern Malaysia through their perspiration and entrepreneurship. Some of their ancestors came to the country long before many of the Malays. Though they desire to preserve their ethnic identity and culture, they feel they are no less loyal to Malaysia. Economically, they are a more productive segment of the society and pay most of the taxes. Therefore they consider themselves entitled to equal rights in all respects, not sufferance or second-class citizenship.[24]

The Chinese domination of education, professions, and economy is alarming to the Malays. They view with concern the growing Chinese control of modern technology. They feel they must use their political supremacy for the advancement of their community through direct government intervention even at the risk of reduced efficiency and lower economic growth.[25]

Chinese naturally scorn these proposals. They contend that free and open competition must pervade all institutions.

In their view, preferential treatment of Malays in terms of jobs, scholarships, licenses, land reservations, and other subsidies is against their very interests. They would depend on external protection rather than to develop their self-initiative, self-reliance, and competitiveness. Further, they assert, the real beneficiaries of the special privileges generally are not the common Malays for whom they are meant but a small number of influential people who have access to government. 26

As a community, the Malays are naturally in favor of having special privileges and would like them to be further increased. They feel they are the weaker segment of the society, can not compete successfully with the other communities, and need the protection. After all, they claim, the country belongs to them and the Chinese and Indians are aliens. They should have only those rights which the Malays themselves think fit to give them. They should be grateful for the rights which they have been given instead of being jealous of the special privileges of the Malay community. The non-Malays agree that the Malays need to be given certain special privileges until they are capable of competing without any help, but they are opposed to their expansion or permanence.27

Islam has been recognized as the state religion in the

constitution. This has generated intense communal tension and has caused considerable anxiety among the Chinese and Indians who are mostly non-Moslems. They fear the rise of Malay religious nationalism and suppression of their own religious beliefs. The extremists among Malays seek to establish Malay supremacy by unifying the Malay community through an appeal to their emotions on religious grounds. They believe that Malaysia should be the homeland of Islam only. They want active government support to promote Islam in the country. It is the political implication behind the religious issue that is baneful. The unification of the Malay community based on religious sentiments for political purposes would render it intransigent in its dealings with the other communities. [28]

The language issue has been no less an obstacle to communal harmony. The declaration of Malay as the sole official language affects the non-Malays adversely both materially and culturally. The language issue is a significant component of Malay nationalism. Malays want cultural homogeneity based on Malay characteristics including the Malay language. The non-Malays have shown strong determination to maintain their own cultural identity. They accept the desirability of local orientation in education, but they insist on cultural diversity. They are willing to become Malaysians politically, but they want to remain Chinese and Indians culturally. They consider

Malay culture and Malay language inferior to their own. Despite their refusal to accept cultural homogeneity, they recognize the need to learn the Malay language. Malays, on the other hand, are determined to establish their own superiority, advance the Malay culture, and promote the Malay language throughout Malaysia.[29]

In their zeal for supremacy the Malays have effectively excluded the non-Malays from top administrative positions in the government. According to the constitution the offices of the supreme head of the state, the deputy supreme head, and the prime minister are open to Muslim Malays only. Likewise, the heads of the constituent states are all Muslim Malays. Malays have also taken measures to advance their own culture and ignore the presence of the minorities. Malay has been adopted as the national language. Islam has been established as the state religion and is actively propagated by the government, although the freedom of other religions is guaranteed. The national flag contains the Islamic star and crescent. These visible symbols of Malaysian polity and society have been exclusively drawn from Malay culture and include no object of sentimental attachment to the non-Malays which could evoke their national pride.[30]

Each Malaysian community has its own religion, language, customs, and practices, and most Malaysians identify themselves and others on communal lines. This has been a source of impediment

to the creation of national consciousness. But perhaps the most disturbing development of post-independence era, in terms of national unity, has been the resurgence of chauvinistic Malay nationalism. There has been a growing tendency among Malays to assert their superior claims in the country and to deny the existence of non-Malays. In the name of national unification they strive to impose their culture, language, and religion on minorities. Non-Malays have expressed their deep dissatisfaction with the measures adopted for the advancement of Malaynization. They wish to preserve cultural variety and insist that multi-lingualism should be the national policy and that education should be truly national, not Malay-dominated.[31]

At present there are no visible signs of an amicable solution to the communal problem of Malaysia and the attitudes of the extremists only tend to compound the difficulty. It is extremely unlikely that communal integration would emerge in the foreseeable future and any immediate expectation of it is quixotic fancy. What is possible is that after the extremists are convinced of the futility of internecine confrontation and of the inevitability of coexistence, the moderates would prevail in initiating the process of accommodation. But so long as the Malays persevere in their goal of ascendancy, the non-Malays would remain nervous and would offer resistance to what they perceive to be their suppression.[32]

Ethnicity and Education

Evidence of formal education in ancient Malaysia is not available. But it is not unreasonable to surmise that the primitive tribes gave practical instruction to their children in fishing, trapping, and farming. In the Buddhist kingdoms of Langkasuka and Sri Vijaya education was probably associated with the monasteries and comprised mostly Buddhist scriptures. Later in the Hindu empire of Majapahit temples were the seats of learning and Hindu scriptures formed the curriculum. Subsequently Malaysia came under the influence of Islam and children were taught verses from Quran in Arabic in mosques. It was not until after the advent of the British rule and the immigration of the Chinese and Indians that schools with distinct ethnic bias began to be established and the rudiments of formal education in the western sense began to be imparted. During the British rule four types of schools emerged: Malay, Chinese, Indian, and English schools.

Malay Schools

The teaching of Quran in Arabic formed the foundation of Malay schools. These schools were attended exclusively by Malay children. The curriculum primarily included Islamic religious instructions and the Malay language. In conformity with its pro-Malay policy the colonial government initially financed the Malay schools partially. Later with full financial support these schools were transformed into Government Malay Schools.[33]

The major thrust of the British policy was to promote primary Malay education, not English education, so that the Malay youth be not alientated from the Malay language and culture. A significant exception to this policy was the provision of education of the English public school type for the Malay aristocracy.[34]

Chinese Schools

The colonial government felt no responsibility for the education of the Chinese and made no provision for it. Left to themselves, the Chinese established their own schools on the pattern of their mother land and continued their own traditions and culture. They recruited teachers mostly from China who kept the Chinese nationalism alive in Malaysia. These schools drew their inspiration from China, followed Chinese curriculum, taught through Chinese language (Kuo-Yu), and adopted Chinese ideology. In response to the Chinese Revolution of 1911 they acquired revolutionary outlook and in essence became instruments of a foreign power. To all intents and purposes they were Chinese schools on Malaysian soil.[35]

Being alarmed by the seditious nature of operation and the anti-national tendencies of the Chinese schools, the government passed the Registration of Schools Ordinance of 1920 to supervise them closely. In 1935 the government offered them monetary aid if they would agree to meet the standards of the

Education Department. However, most Chinese schools preferred to maintain their independence and decided not to accept the government aid.[36]

Indian Schools

The education of Indians was closely associated with the development of plantations in Malaysia. The Labor Ordinance of 1923 required estate owners to provide schools if their workers had ten or more children of school-age (7-14). The government gave a small annual per capita grant on the basis of examination results and average attendance. The medium of instruction was Tamil, the mother tongue of the children. Because of ill-qualified and low-paid teachers, part-time students, and meager facilities, these schools provided education of a very poor quality.[37]

English Schools

There were two types of English schools. The "free" schools and grant-in-aid schools. The "free" schools were established by local efforts, enjoyed the patronage of the government, and charged fees. They were called "free" because they were open to all children regardless of race, color, or creed. Because of financial difficulties these schools were later taken over by the government and became public-supported institutions.[38]

The grant-in-aid schools were established and maintained by missionary and charitable societies with a certain amount of

government aid. The London Missionary Society, the American Methodist Mission, and Roman Catholic Mission were the most active organizations.[39] In return for the government aid the mission schools conformed to the standards of the Education Department, although the government had always maintained a close supervision over their religious activities. These schools were open to children of all races and creeds and they emphasized Christian education.[40] By and large the English schools provided western-oriented education through the medium of English language. These schools were located in urban centers and their primary purpose during the colonial period was to train a few local people for clerical services and for junior positions in administrative and professional services.[41]

The teacher training also followed the ethnic pattern of the schools. Consequently there were separate teacher training programs for Malay, Chinese, Indian, and English schools.[42]

Thus ethnic factor influenced the educational development at all levels in Malaysia during the British rule. In conformity with the political philosophy of the period, the colonial government did not consider provision of education as its legitimate function, and did not regard education as an instrument for national development. It looked upon it as a welfare service, more or less left it to the private voluntary bodies such as missionary societies or public-spirited individuals to provide English, Chinese, and Indian education, gave little financial aid in some instances, and exercised minimum of control.[43]

The only exception was the vernacular education for the Malays which the government undertook to provide itself. The government recognized Malays as the natives of Malaysia, considered them as the weaker segment of the society, and therefore felt morally obligated to protect and promote their interests.[44] On the other hand, the Chinese and Indians were considered immigrants having no claims on Malaysia. They were judged as progressive and competitive groups and were left to themselves to look after their own interests including education. This system of education tended to widen the gulf separating the various communities.[45]

Non-Malays, Chinese in particular, are educationally advanced whereas the Malays have been traditionally backward. Probably the bountiful nature and ease of life offered no challenge to the Malays for survival and no incentive for cultural advancement.[46] In the value system of the Chinese, on the other hand, education has always occupied a prominent place, and they brought along with them their educational traditions from their homeland. The government policy of <u>laissez-faire</u> allowed them the freedom to pursue their educational activities unhindered. Also, superior educational facilities generally have been available in urban centers where mostly non-Malays, especially Chinese, are concentrated. The result has been that the Chinese have been ahead of the other communities in education.[47]

The strong sense of cultural separateness displayed by the non-Malays, especially the Chinese, may in large part be attributed to the laissez-faire policy of the colonial government toward education in the 1920's and 1930's. The government permitted the operation of schools on ethnic lines instead of laying the foundation of a national system of education for all races using English as the medium of instruction. In fact, during this period no effort was made to formulate and enforce a unified policy designed to incorporate local orientation in education,[48] The government did not supervise the curriculum, methods of teaching, training of teachers or their recruitment. Consequently it was normal for Chinese schools to recruit their teachers from China, to provide Chinese education, and to reflect Chinese ideology. Since the schools did not need financial support from the government, they developed a completely independent attitude which has persisted in varying degrees to the present day.[49]

By the middle of the twentieth century there had developed in Malaysia not an educational system but a motley of schools unrelated to and independent of each other, by and large governed by ethnic considerations. They worked satisfactorily so long as the communities had no interaction with one another and the administration of the country was under the control of the British colonial government. But with the rise of nationalism,

beginning of freedom movement, growth of communal consciousness, and realization of the importance of education in national life, stresses began to develop over the curriculum and medium of instruction in schools which have generated intense racial tensions in Malaysia.

After the World war II it became apparent that Britain would withdraw its control from its colonies and grant them independence. The racial situation in Malaysia was extremely volatile and portended dangerous consequences at the termination of the British rule. Unification of the three main ethnic groups--Malays, Chinese, and Indians--was the most urgent task that awaited the national leaders soon after their assumption of the reins of the self-government. A common single educational system for all children of the country was considered to be the most important instrument for the development of national consciousness. A number of committees and commissions were appointed to examine the educational problem and to evolve a formula that would harmonize the racial differences and unify the nation. Among the noteworthy ones were the Central Advisory Committee on Education (1949), the Barnes Committee (1950), Fenn-Wu Committee (1951), The Razak Committee (1956), and Reid Commission (1957). These bodies produced voluminous reports containing numerous plans to evolve a national system of education.[50]

Pursuant to its pro-Malay policy, the British colonial government transferred the political power to the Malays before withdrawing from the country in 1957. In the initial stage of its self-government Malaysia was fortunate to have had Malay leaders of the Alliance Party who were moderate, liberal, enlightened, and truly nationalistic in their perspective. They sought to unify the nation by accommodating the legitimate aspirations of the other ethnic groups and promised to preserve and sustain the growth of the languages and cultures of the non-Malay races. They also pledged to establish Malay as the national language and as the main medium of instruction in schools in due course.[51]

These views were embodied in the recommendations of the Razak Committee Report (1956) which in turn were incorporated in the Education Ordinance of 1957. This Education Ordinance was the first attempt to introduce a national system of education with the following policy statement:

> The education policy of the Federation is to establish a national system of education acceptable to the people as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic, and political development as a nation, with the intention of making the Malay language the national language of the country whilst preserving the growth of the language and culture of the people other than Malays living in the country.[52]

Subsequently, there has been a drastic departure from this policy which has caused extreme dissatisfaction among the non-Malays and has contributed to racial tensions in the country.

In 1969 the government announced the policy of making Malay as the main medium of instruction at all levels of education by 1985. It aimed to establish a single multiracial school system with a common language (Malay), common curriculum, and common public examinations.[53] English will be retained as a compulsory second language in all schools and Chinese and Tamil primary schools will still continue, but their pupils will have to become proficient in Malay to compete at the secondary and higher educational levels.[54]

Educationally, the policy of making Malay the sole medium of instruction is disadvantageous to all pupils whose native tongue is not Malay. Their failure rate in the Malay language examinations (a compulsory requirement for advancement to secondary and higher education) is extremely high, resulting in a wastage of academically-talented non-Malays. Malays have to be only bilingual whereas non-Malays have to learn three languages, which imposes additional academic burden on the latter. Finally, although a language of considerable richness and antiquity, Malay is not considered adequate for the nuances and technicalities of the modern world.[55]

Like primary and secondary education, higher education has also been a source of racial friction in Malaysia. The non-Malays have viewed the university education and proficiency in

English language as means to get into professions and the coveted and relatively well-paid civil service jobs. The Malays, educationally backward, have never been able to acquire higher education in numbers commensurate with their proportion in the population and have regarded university as the preserve for the non-Malays who are more skilled in English. They have considered this as a weakness of Malay culture and language and have resented it.[56]

With the independence of Malaysia political power passed into the hands of Malays who now control the government. This has created a division of political and economic power between Malays and Chinese. Education is viewed as the means to foster in the Malay community the financial and technical skills traditionally lacking. Consequently Malays are now the sole recipients of all educational advantages: free primary and secondary education and a monopoly of grants for further education.[57]

Access to higher education is closely guarded by the government and racial consideration, not merit, determines admission. Consequently a large number of qualified non-Malays are denied admission whereas Malays of lesser qualifications are encouraged to proceed to university. This policy has led to a kind of apartheid at upper levels which in turn has aggravated race relations and has made a mockery of integration.[58] For

example, at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, the non-Malay students are fee-paying, urban in origin, and English-speaking; the Malays are on scholarships, rural, and speak their mother tongue, Malay. The majority of Malay students major in Islamic and Malay studies, the non-Malay students mostly concentrate in science and technology.[59] Thus the home backgrounds and academic programs of Malay and non-Malay students offer virtually no opportunity for any meaningful social interaction. Besides, the discriminatory treatment meted to the non-Malays can only engender bitterness in them toward their Malay counterparts.

Malay is being introduced steadily as the medium of instruction with the expectation that by 1985 all courses at the university level will be taught in the national language. This will hinder the overseas higher education of non-Malay students in English-speaking countries where they have been traditionally going. From the purely racial standpoint, the outcome of this policy would be comforting to the Malays, but from the national standpoint it would hardly be advantageous. The non-Malays express their resentment privately since public questioning of the national language policy is a seditious offence punishable by heavy fines and long-term imprisonment.[60]

Malay students are imbued with "we-are-the-masters-now" attitude which encourages them to display arrogance in their behavior. In order to achieve racial balance, the Yang-di-Pertuan Agong, Malaysia's elected king, has been authorized by the constitution to reserve university places for Malays. The immediate result has been that the universities are turning out poorly trained Malay graduates. Yet, the employers are coerced to employ them, especially in upper echelon jobs.[61]

Malay-dominated government controls the educational activities of the non-Malays. During 1968 and 1969 the government rejected a proposal made by Chinese leaders to establish Merdeka University using Chinese as the language of instruction on the ground that it would encourage disharmony among the communities. In July 1969 a regulation was issued making it an offence to form, to contribute to, or to collect money for, any higher educational institution without the approval of the minister of education.[62]

This has had the effect of rescinding the Article 152 (1) in the constitution which states:

> No person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (other than for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language; and nothing in this clause shall prejudice the right of the Federal Government or of any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in the Federation.[63]

Attempts to correct the educational imbalance between the Malays and non-Malays through the national language policy and "special privileges" for Malays in the constitution have created a climate of insecurity and frustration among the non-Malays. The racial violence of May 13, 1969, is attributed largely to political maneuvering of the language-education issue prior to the 1969 national elections.[64]

CONCLUSION

Malaysia has a distinctly multi-racial population, and each community has a completely different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic background. These communities compose significant proportions and are to stay in the country. Therefore the most urgent need of the society is communal harmony.

The Malay-controlled government is determined to "restructure" the society and correct its present "racial economic disparities" and create "a Malay commercial and industrial community." It is also convinced that its policy of multi-racial education through Malay as the medium of instruction would promote national unity.[65] However, attempts to restructure the society thus far through the transformation of the educational system have tended to heighten rather than diminish the potential for conflict.[66]

The current policies to restructure the educational and economic systems seem to have emerged not out of concern for the national interest but out of expedient adaptations to political crises. They lack the credibility necessary for affective loyalty of the non-Malays who constitute a significant segment of the population. They are a source of considerable anxiety and resentment among them.[67] In the face of extensive Malaynization program, they fear extinction of their culture, identity, and language. In their view, country's racial fragmentation is worsening.[68] While it is just to provide additional help to cultivate the weaker segments of the society, it is inhuman and nationally suicidal to deliberately retard the progressive elements.

In view of the deep cultural divisions that prevail in the society, it would be impossible to eradicate racial plurality within any reasonable period of time.[69] Nor should it be attempted or even considered desirable. Ethnic variety adds color and richness to the society and complements the strengths and weaknesses of its constituent groups. Besides, the mark of a civilized society is not the extermination or suppression of its minorities but their accommodation and unrestircted advancement. From the standpoint of national interest, the only rational policy available to a plural society to manage its

affairs is that of accommodation and compromise in which all constituent elements have a sense of satisfaction and none feels that its legitimate aspirations are being arbitrarily and oppressingly thwarted.

FOOTNOTES

[1]R. S. Milne, Government and Politics in Malaysia (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), pp. 1-10.

[2]John W. Henderson and others, Area Handbook of Malaysia (Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), pp. 26-27.

[3]Ibid., pp. 29-30

[4]Francis Wong Hoy Kee and Gwee Yee Hean, Perspectives: The Development of Education in Malaysia and Singapore (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd., 1972), pp. 2-5.

[5]John W. Henderson and others, op. cit., pp. 73-76.

[6]Philip Loh, "British Politics and the Education of Malays, 1909-1939," Paedagogica Historica, Vol. 14 (1974), p. 357.

[7]Alvin Rabushka, Race and Politics in Urban Malaysia (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), p. 17.

[8]Philip Loh, op. cit.

[9]John W. Henderson and others, op. cit., pp. 82-89.

[10]Milton J. Esman, Administration and Development in Malaysia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 16-22.

[11]Alvin Rabushka, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

[12]Eng Kiat Koh, "American Educational Policy in the Philippines and the British Policy in Malaya, 1898-1935," Comparative Education Review, Vol. 9 (June, 1965), p. 144.

[13]John W. Henderson and others, op. cit., pp. 300-301.

[14]Ibid., pp. 69-72.

[15]Philip Loh, op. cit.

[16]Alvin Rabushka, op. cit., p. 30.

[17]Ibid., p. 31.

[18]Ibid., p. 33.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[21]Manning Nash, "Ethnicity, Centrality, and Education in Pasir Mas, Kelantan," Comparative Education Review, Vol. 16 (February, 1972), p. 15.

[22]K. J. Ratnam, Communalism and The Political Process in Malaya (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965, p. 14.

[23]Milton J. Esman, op. cit., pp. 20-22.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., p. 23.

[27]K. J. Ratnam, op. cit., pp. 113-117.

[28]Ibid., pp. 123-126.

[29]Ibid., pp. 126-136.

[30]Milton J. Esman, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

[31]K. J. Ratnam, op. cit., p. 24.

[32]Ibid., pp. 135-136.

[33]B. Simandjuntak, Malayan Federalism 1945-1963 (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 193.

[34]Philip Loh, op. cit., p. 371.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Francis Wong Hoy Kee and Ee Tiang Hong, Education in Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd., 1971), p. 13.

[39]Francis Wong Hoy Kee and Gwee Yee Hean, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

[40]Francis Wong, "The Christian Missions and Education in Malaysia and Singapore," Teacher Education in New Countries, Vol. 12 (November, 1971), p. 146.

[41]Charles Hirschman, "Educational Patterns in Colonial Malaya," Comparative Education Review, Vol. 16 (October, 1972), p. 489.

[42]Francis Wong Hoy Kee and Gwee Yee Hean, op. cit., pp. 12-14.

[43]Charles Hirschman, op. cit., p. 500.

[44]Philip Loh, op. cit., p. 357.

[45]Eng Kiat Koh, op. cit., p. 144.

[46]Philip Loh, op. cit., p. 357.

[47]Milton J. Esman, op. cit., p. 22.

[48]Wong Hoy-Kee, "The Development of a National Language in Indonesia and Malaysia," Comparative Education, Vol. 7 (November, 1971), p. 78.

[49]K. J. Ratnam, op. cit., pp. 135-136.

[50]B. Simandjuntak, op. cit., pp. 194-204.

[51]Ibid., p. 202.

[52]P. Navaratnarajah, "Education in Malaysia," New Era, Vol. 50 (July-August, 1969), p. 176.

[53]John W. Henderson and others, op. cit., p. 167.

[54]Pat Barr, "At Rice Roots Level," Times (London) Educational Supplement, No. 3176, (April 16, 1976), p. 25.

[55]Ibid.

[56]B. Simandjuntak, op. cit., pp. 209-210.

[57]Richard Greenough and Rado Klose, "Learning to be Malaysians," Times (London) Educational Supplement, No. 2995, (October 20, 1972), p. 78.

[58]James Morgan, "Tenuous Balance Between the Races," Times (London) Educational Supplement, No. 2946, (November 5, 1971), p. 17.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid.

[62]John W. Henderson and others, op. cit., pp. 187-188.

[63]Y. C. Yen and Y. H. Gwee, "Primary and Mass Education in Malaysia," World Year Book of Education (London: Evans Brothers, 1965), p. 409.

[64]Paul Pedersen, "Possibilities for Violence in Malaysia," Current History, Vol. 61. (December, 1971), p. 340.

[65]Pat Barr, op. cit.

[66]Paul Pedersen, op. cit.

[67]Ibid., p. 367.

[68]Richard Greenough and Rado Klose, op. cit.

[69]K. J. Ratnam, op. cit., p. 213.

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